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## CULTURAL FACTORS IN THE CHINESE CRISIS.

The impending final meeting between the Orient and the Occident, of which the world has so suddenly become conscious, has long been foreboded in Western literature and philosophy. The intellectual treasures of India were first revealed to the Western mind when Sir William Jones made the masterpieces of Sanskrit literature accessible, and advanced the suggestions that led to the foundation of comparative philology, which has so deeply influenced all the branches of our learning in the "humanities." In the field of jurisprudence the work of Sir Henry Maine and Rudolf von Ihering bears witness to the mutual approach of the two civilizations. But it is especially the philosophy of the last half of the nineteenth century which bears the deep traces of Oriental influence. Schopenhauer, the representative thinker of the pessimistic and realistic period, derived his inspiration from the intellectual ideals of Buddhism, while Comte, Renan and Nietzsche adopted the Oriental conception of the caste structure of society as the only normal form. In the field of religion, entirely aside from the revival of Occultism, Eastern thought has exerted a deep influence, especially on the continent of Europe. The Parliament of Religions at Chicago offered the best opportunity to observe the mutual courtesy and respect that prevail between the more enlightened representatives of the great systems of belief. In art, Kipling has made the atmosphere of Oriental life familiar to Western readers—a strange paradox, as he himself is the most remarkable exponent of Western energy and progress. In a different manner, but with even more pervasive influence, Wagner's music, inspired by a pessimistic philosophy and expressive of truly Eastern luxuriance and sensuousness, has brought the European mind under the spell of Oriental feeling.

The Chinese crisis has advanced this approach between the oldest and the youngest civilizations to an entirely new phase. In India, so far the chief camping ground of the European in the East, there has been practically no amalgamation of races. With the constantly increasing facility of transportation, the residence of the English has become more and more temporary, so that the knowledge of native life, with which during the days of the East India Company the officials were thoroughly familiar, is now becoming rare among them ; they are mere temporary sojourners who in no way enter into the intimate life of the people. The Portuguese are the only European people who succeeded to some extent in assimilating the Hindus, intermarrying with them and leaving the impress of their religion and language in India, to last through centuries, even down to the present day. But the regions which they occupied and where they exerted their influence seem infinitesimal in the present era of colonial expansion. Nothing can be more superficial nor more alien to the true soul and spirit of popular life than the English civilization at present superimposed over the native society of India. In an entirely mechanical manner the Hindu *babu* acquires the knowledge necessary to pass the civil service examinations. Thus, it is well known that translations of Latin classics are generally memorized from beginning to end by the aspiring candidates. Their spirit does not enter into the work and hence the result is a rather shoddy civilization.

In China conditions are entirely different. The climate makes the permanent residence of white men possible and it admits of no doubt that the races will there mutually influence each other in the most far-reaching manner. Of prime importance in this connection is the entirely different basis of the Russian position in China from that of the British in India. Russia seeks a home for her teeming millions of farmers, who are ready and willing to work the soil with their own hands. Between the Cossacks and the Chinese

there existed great friendliness and mutual confidence before the war. The Russians are Oriental enough in their nature not to feel themselves above the peoples of the Far East, so that they fraternize with them and even undergo a partial assimilation. Russia's paramount importance in contemporary history is her position as chief mediator between the East and the West.

Japan is also eagerly striving to fill this rôle. The island kingdom has found the mechanism of European civilization very profitable. Her craving for social recognition among the nations has been satisfied. But, having opened the eyes of the world to the real weakness of China, she considers it an injustice that she should not be permitted to lead in the reformation of the ancient empire. She is confident that she knows the true needs of the Chinese better than the other nations, and while she is convinced of the hopeless corruption of the Chinese dynasty and political system, she thoroughly believes in the soundness and vigor of the mass of the people. Were she left free to carry out her aims she would introduce Western methods much more rapidly and completely than Russia, and especially in the field of politics she would support liberal reforms that could never be expected at the hands of the northern empire.

The Western governments are, in the Chinese question, animated chiefly by a desire for commercial opportunity and for the safety of industrial investments. They look upon civilization and religion as a commercial asset, and give the missionaries that ostentatious political protection which has aroused the opposition of the masses in China. If given the opportunity they would rapidly and radically transform Chinese institutions and civilization, without, however, understanding the true inner life of the people nor moving the depths of their spirit.

But it is China herself that is the essential factor in the problem. The principal elements of Chinese civilization which we have to consider in this connection are the Confu-

cian morality, the religions of Buddhism and Taoism, the system of state examinations, and the system of local government and guilds.

To anyone who reads the hackneyed moral sentiments that decorate the walls of Chinese public buildings, like the Tsung-li-yamên, Confucian morality will seem little better than a trite hypocrisy, a national "*sauver la face*." But though its ordinary precepts seem so commonplace, and though its influence seems to exhaust itself in an elaborate ceremoniousness, still its teachings on the personal relations form the very backbone of Chinese civilization. This is especially true of the command of filial piety and the absolute subjection of the younger to the older generation; the consequent unswerving reverence for the past which permeates all Chinese life, constitutes the real cohesive force in Chinese society. The Chinese people, though so scandalously lax in public morality, are absolutely honest and scrupulous in their dealings with intimates.

Buddhism and Taoism, so widely separate in original inspiration, have come to subserve the same needs in China. The religious nature of the Chinese is atrophied, they lack enthusiasm and fervor and their Confucianism is nothing more than a rationalistic system of social morality. The religion once inherent in Buddhism has become reduced to ceremonial observances and expiatory sacrifices little above the practices of pure paganism. The great Buddhist revival which is at present stirring India, Siam, and even Japan, is scarcely as yet felt in China. The mandarins especially consider themselves above religious belief, and are given to a cold rationalism which despises all religions alike as merely food for popular superstitions.

In the Chinese state examination system we find the theory of Plato's Republic put into practice. The rulers of the state are selected by a long and rigorous course of education, and when so selected they constitute not only the political government, but the uppermost social caste. Still

the institution is thoroughly democratic from the fact that the son of even the poorest family can, through industry and intellectual brilliance, rise to the highest positions of influence. It has been argued that the present corruption and inefficiency of the Chinese government invalidates the principle of civil service examinations. Such a contention utterly overlooks the fact that the matter in which the Chinese officials are examined is absolutely unpractical, and that the examinations test not the understanding and grasp, but the memory of the candidate. Notwithstanding the abuses that are at present rife in the system, it still constitutes the unifying mechanism of the empire, and it could easily be utilized as the lever of reform. Kwang Su recognized this, and all his reformatory edicts were educational in their character. Had he not been deserted in the hour of need by the British government, who had allowed themselves, at this most inopportune time, to become involved in the South African struggle, the educational system of China might before now have worked wonders in spreading Western ideas, and the chasm into which China has fallen might have been bridged over.

The central government does not weigh heavily upon the people. Taxes are inconsiderable, and there is little general legislation. Most of the government is carried on by the local organs, in which the clan and the family are of paramount importance. The subjection of all the members of the family to their elders and the absolute responsibility of the latter for the good conduct of their charges constitute the chief guarantees for the maintenance of public security. While there is therefore no individualism in China, the unit of society being not the individual but the family, there is a good deal of local self-government, in which the elders have a decisive voice. Analagous to the clan relationship are the guilds of merchants and artisans. To their influence the high character of Chinese commercial honesty and the excellence of the products of Chinese industry are largely

due. Moreover, their customs and regulations furnish a substitute for the commercial law, which is practically non-existent. Most cases involving contracts or transfers of property are arbitrated before the guild tribunals, and an appeal to mandarin justice is avoided by business men. Foreign merchants are thus generally left to rely on the promise of their Chinese customers, unenforced by a legal sanction. Though repeated efforts have been made by the British to secure a commercial code in China, the law is still in the condition of the law merchant of mediæval Europe.

The great question at the present time is, how will Chinese civilization be affected by the new forces that are crowding in upon it on all sides. For the time being, the current of feeling among the Chinese is against all change, against all foreigners, and all foreign influences. But the present revolt is more than a reactionary demonstration. The entire Chinese people, from the most powerful mandarins to the lowliest laborers, are in a state of unrest, excitement and panic. The Manchu party has succeeded at present in directing this unrest against the foreigners, but it might as easily have been aimed against the Manchu régime, or even against all law and order; for with all their respect for settled relations the Chinese are prone to become distracted when they feel that things are going wrong. We cannot withhold our sympathy from a people whose ideal is a peaceful and orderly civilization and who have the highest social virtues, but who are driven to a frenzy by misgovernment and the greed of foreign exploitation.

The actual revolt has been confined to the ignorant lower classes. The educated Chinese, especially in the south, are not at bottom averse to reform and progress. Should the revolt be confined within its present limits the breach may be healed, if the powers show more adroitness and more regard for the rights and susceptibilities of the Chinese than they manifested before the war. Granting that order can be restored, what influence may we

expect the various elements of Western civilization to exert in China? There is no doubt that the reform movement of 1898 enlisted the enthusiasm of large numbers of *litterati* and was in a fair way to succeed, when blocked by underhanded means. Though the enthusiasm of the reformers was somewhat naïve, and though they showed no technical mastery of Western civilization, they correctly read the needs of their time and adopted practical measures. The reform attacked the old system of education and substituted for an antiquated erudition the practical knowledge of modern social and industrial life. In addition to changing the character of the state examinations, the government also provided for the establishment of mining schools and schools in railway engineering in connection with every concession granted to a foreign corporation. Thus the Chinese sought in the shortest possible time to master the scientific principles of industry so as to become independent of foreign aid. The practical spirit of the Chinese makes them especially accessible from this side. They would accept conveniences in commerce and in the industries long before they would modify their ideas of government or of the customs and proprieties of social intercourse.

In this respect China is different from Japan. The Japanese, being eminently social, sought the society of other nations and were especially influenced by their political institutions. The Malay ingredient in their blood seems to make their nature more pliable and alert, while the Chinese are set and immovable in their social and political conceptions. The latter will readily learn from the stranger the mechanic arts, which they regard as subservient to their needs, but they will be slow to modify their essential ideas of life and society. As they are free from religious fanaticism, they would allow Christianity to take its place by the side of Buddhism and Taoism as a religion of the masses, provided it did not interfere with filial piety, ancestor worship, and the Chinese ideas of the proper relation



of the sexes. These institutions and ideas are regarded even by the rationalist mandarins as the immovable foundation of Chinese society, and any religion attacking them must prepare for a life and death struggle, such as that between Christianity and Roman stoicism.

Chinese manufactures have not passed beyond the stage of house industries, but in many branches the artisans are entitled to rank as artists, while careful and honest methods of production are safeguarded by the rigid rules of the guilds. Unfortunately it is to be feared that with the introduction of large factories there will be the same woeful destruction of artistic industries, the same cheapening and coarsening of manufactured articles, that we witness in India. On the other hand it is true that pictorial and dramatic art in China is at present held by the same bonds of conservatism and immovable adherence to conventionalities which are proving so disastrous in political life, so that a change to European standards would in this respect certainly be beneficial. Chinese literature, also, has much to gain, if, by a sweeping reform an alphabet could be substituted for the prevailing system of word-signs. At present fine writing consists largely in the employment of unusual word-signs, and the student of rhetoric is forced in consequence to burden his memory with thousands of these useless and intricate combinations.

In their efforts to remodel the civilization of China, the Western powers have not succeeded in reaching the inner life of the Orientals. The missionaries, with all their genuine sympathy and self-sacrificing devotion, antagonize them by opposing their cherished social customs and institutions; the traders, disdaining the trouble of understanding their natures, frankly despise them. Hence, any influence that may be exerted will come from the plane of economic and political superiority, and will be in danger of leading to the same superficial civilization that has been produced in India. England, on account of her multifarious experience and the adaptability of her methods, will be most likely to succeed in

an external imposition of Western industrial and political institutions. Less can be said for Germany and France unless they abandon their cast-iron systems of administration, and enter more into the spirit of the life among the natives.

Japan, in her ambition to be the mediator as well as the Albion of the Orient, is becoming constantly more fearful of Russian encroachment. While she has brought herself to realize that the occupation of Manchuria by Russia is reasonable and necessary, she would not willingly brook any further extension of Russian influence. Between the Chinese and the Japanese, however, there is also little sympathy. Racial affinities do not always lead to political friendship, as we see in the case of England and Germany. To the Chinese, the dwellers of the island kingdom are inferior dwarfs, to be treated with hauteur or even contempt, and few Japanese find it convenient to reside in China. Consequently they would welcome an opportunity further to impress the Chinese with their real strength. They would readily introduce the mechanism of European civilization into China, but, as they themselves have not as yet caught its spirit, their mediation would be no less superficial than that of the Western powers, although for different reasons.

In many ways Russia seems the destined mediator between the East and the West. In her civilization she combines European and Asiatic characteristics, as in her polity she unites the nationalism of Western Europe with the imperialistic ideal. Her pliable and unscrupulous diplomacy, her ceremonious religion, the simple and impressive absolutism of her government, fit her especially to deal with Orientals. Even her vices come to her assistance. The recent brutality of the Cossacks along the Amur, where an American traveler<sup>1</sup> in one day saw twenty thousand dwellings of peaceful Chinese in flames, and the river for miles black with the corpses of their former inhabitants, must indeed leave terrible memories.

<sup>1</sup>G. Frederick Wright in *The Nation*, Sept. 27, 1900

So will the looting practiced by Russian soldiers around Tientsin, which apparently the officers conscientiously tried to prevent. But in the Orient these outbursts of passion and cruelty may even add to the prestige of Russia. The Chinese are accustomed to sudden and brutal executions, and they have a fatalistic respect for any one who is powerful and unscrupulous enough to carry them out.

Beyond finding new regions in which her people may settle Russia has no high cultural aims in the Orient. While at home she insists upon religious uniformity, she makes no propaganda of orthodoxy in the East. After a region has been occupied and its people terrified into submission, her emigrants settle down peacefully by the side of the older inhabitants and gradually influence their habits and customs. The question in Eastern Asia will be, which has the greater assimilating capacity, Russia or China? It is to be feared that Russia, already semi-oriental, will become still more Asiatic as she succeeds in extending her dominion in China. Still, the deeper we enter into the study of the character of Russia, the less can we avoid the conclusion that her destined work is mainly in the East. She is not touched with the rationalism and individualism of the Occident. As one of her greatest writers has said, "Russia cannot be understood with the intellect, she must be believed in." Her writers, like Lermontow and Dostojewski, have given us in their descriptions of East-Russian life more of the flavor of the Orient than we can find in the literature of any other nation.

The assimilation of Northern China by Russia cannot be prevented. The promise at present offered by the Russian government that it will evacuate Manchuria is impossible of fulfillment. The railway interests already acquired are too great to be abandoned, and without Manchuria the Eastern empire of Russia would remain mutilated. Germany, the nearest neighbor of Russia in Europe and in Asia, makes no objection to the expansion of her power. She recognizes

the civilizing mission of the northern empire and also profits from her constantly expanding markets, which German manufactures in great measure supply.

The character of the various powers as civilizers in China will soon become apparent; for though an open partition is unlikely and the exercise of direct sovereignty seems impossible, the powers have acquired such important interests in the various parts of China that they will continue to influence the destiny of these regions. The international competition will make the powers still more careful of their actions than Great Britain has been in India, so that they may be expected to employ their best energies in the work. A great difference will exist between the relations established in the south of China, which will be chiefly commercial, and those of the north, which will be ethnical. This is not the place to speculate on the probable reaction of these developments on Western civilization, however important it may be. It is noteworthy that just at present a great Buddhist revival is taking place in Siam, Ceylon, Burma and Japan—a revival destined to purge Buddhism of the corrupt and degenerate elements which for two thousand years it has taken on and to restore it to its pristine purity. When thus reformed it will be much more likely to exert an important influence on Western thought and civilization than when burdened with the odium of superstitious practices as at present. Whether in politics the opening of the Orient will lead to an emphasizing of absolutism, and to a discouragement of individualistic and liberal principles of government, is a question which must engage the most serious thought of student and statesman, especially as there are many symptoms of such a tendency in all parts of the Western world.

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